

SONGS
OF THE
ROSE

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WILL A. MCKEE

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The
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The Heart of the Rose

By

MABEL A. MCKEE, 1886-



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The Heart of the Rose



HE was her brother. The thought gave her the same thrill this morning as it had given her on a morning seventeen years back, when the old family doctor had laid a tiny bundle in her arms and said, "You'll have to be his sister and mother both, Elizabeth."

Her twelve years then

The hung heavily on her ; her
Heart little face, stained with the
of the marks of recent tears, took
Rose on a warmer glow as she
touched the baby's hand.
She had unfolded the baby
blanket and slipped on his
first little clothes. And as
she dressed him, she felt a
sense of loss ; with every
fresh garment he seemed to
become less of an angel and
more of a human being.
The same feeling of loss
was now in her heart as
she folded his great Indian
blankets, slipped his photo-
graphs into the case and

filled the nooks and crevices of his trunk with "little surprises" to drive away the first bitter longings for home. She lifted a thick white wool sweater; it brought the memory of a little soft flannel shirt. She buried her face in its folds and murmured in a tearful voice, "Why, he is my man brother and I am sending him from home to college."

His foot sounded on the stairway; his clear boyish voice called, "Beth, where are you?"

The Heart of the Rose Before she could answer he entered the room. Throwing several bundles onto the bed, he gave a sigh of relief. He tugged impatiently at the strings as he explained: "These are some things the girls made me. It's great to be going away, isn't it? Why, I feel just like I was getting out of a cage; I feel like I was going to fly. Say, what is this, anyway?"

He held up a small book, shaped to resemble the bud of a flower. It was made of white water-colour paper

and every leaf was fastened to the other leaves by small white cords. On the front was the picture of a baby; on the back was a pair of black kid doll shoes.

“Where did you get it?”
his sister asked.

“Rose gave it to me; she told me a long time ago that she was making me a book of memories; that I was to open just one page a week. That’s my baby picture, all right, but why on earth has she put those doll slippers on the back? And why is it shaped in

The this funny way? What
Heart makes girls such queer crea-
of the
Rose tures, anyway, Beth?"

She laughed. "I guess, Floyd, if this is a book of memories, that last page is to picture the last great event of your life—your graduation night. Don't you remember how your new patent leathers pinched your feet, so that you limped across the platform after your diploma? It is shaped like a rosebud, for it is like that. Every week you will open a new petal, and finally, when you have

opened them all, it will be a full-blown rose. When you come back Rose will have unfolded a few petals, too."

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Rose

"Well, I am going to unfold every one of these right now. I never could wait that long to see what is in the centre. Of course I have a vague idea, but I want to be sure. So in two minutes we will know this mystery."

"No," she said firmly, taking the book from his hand. "What would the book mean to you then, Floyd? Every particle of

The the pleasure—the expecta-
Heart of the Rose tion—would be gone. It took Rose a long time to make this book and you surely would not destroy its value in a few minutes. She even formed every leaf like a petal, so that it would give you the pleasure of watching it unfold like a real rose. It is just a symbol of herself—a little bud of promise."

"She's great to think of all that; I like her. Oh, she and Dorothy are going to stop a minute to-night; Dot has something for me

and I want them to see some of my things. But I do want to open this book.

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I guess I will give it to you to keep until I am ready to shut this trunk, so it won't be such a temptation. But let's eat pretty soon; I am simply starved."

At the supper table he talked incessantly of his departure. One moment he wished that she could go along; the next he exulted over the idea of being in a house with a crowd of fellows. While he talked a boy came to the door and

The was dragged in by a ruth-
Heart less hand. While they ate
of the quantities of hot waffles they
Rose talked of the “fellows and
girls.” For the most part
they talked of the girls. The
sister heard new phrases—a
new language; he had al-
ways used a different one to
her. They spoke of girls as
“four-flushers,” as “easies,”
as “stiffs” and “stand-pat-
ters.” Occasionally Floyd
stopped in the centre of a
remark and nodded his
head warningly towards his
sister, but the talkative John
rambled on, speaking in a

free and easy way of the
girls he had grown up
with.

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During the last year Floyd had ceased to talk to his sister about his girl friends, and they seldom came to his home. In her presence his comrades talked continually of school; but if she was busy near she could hear them laughing and chatting in tones different from the ones they used when she was there. She had tried in every way she could to attract them to her home, for formerly they had

The come in great crowds. But
Heart of the Rose Floyd did not seem to want
them; he preferred going
to their homes. At times
she wondered if she had
been in their way when they
had come.

When the two girls came
she greeted them warmly;
they had belonged to the
crowd which had come in
the past often for cookies
and for help in long, knotty
problems. Then, thinking
they might not remain if
she was present, she went
into the next room.
Through the open door she

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Rose

watched them. She could not help watching; she had been deprived of all her girlhood and now she wanted to enjoy theirs.

Dorothy, a dimpled, laughing girl with great, brown eyes and masses of curls which were always rumpled, threw her hat into a chair and was soon seated between the two boys, showing them the posters she had made for Floyd. The sister saw Floyd move very close to the girl and lay his hand on her shoulder with a caressing movement; she

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Rose

The caught the glance that he gave—a glance full of bold admiration and meaning.

Rose stood near the table, watching the other girl. In her eyes was a look of longing, and yet it was mingled with fear. The three on the sofa soon drew her into their circle. John was open in his admiration of both girls; he tried to distribute his caresses with an impartial hand, but the little Rose drew away with that expression of dread in her eyes. Floyd was not so bold; he lightly laid his

hand on her hand, and The
when she did not resent it Heart
clasped it more firmly. Her of the
face flushed, but she suffered Rose
the hand to remain.

Elizabeth was called from the room by some visitors. When they had finally gone she came back to her former seat. She saw a new brother a different one from the one she knew. He was talking in a boisterous tone.

“When are you going to kiss me good-bye, Dot?” he asked.

“Right at the station,” she answered laughingly.

The "Honour bright?" he
Heart asked.

of the Rose "Honour bright," she
promised.

"You are all right," he
exclaimed. "Rose is too
bashful for that." Then he
hinted, "But you see I am
going to take her home to-
night."

Rose coloured as he
gave her a significant
look. She pushed his hand
from her arm and walked
to the piano. But there
was a wavering, an un-
certainty in her face. He
had been her comrade so

long and she really liked him.

The watching sister made a quick decision. When the girls rose to go, she stood up saying, "Floyd, I want you and John to watch the house. I have to see Rose's mother to-night; to-morrow you can see the girls again."

There came a flush of annoyance on the boyish face, followed by one of anger. He knew his sister had been listening. But he was still too loyal to criticize her to John, who, when

The
Heart
of the
Rose

The they were alone, openly de-
Heart nounced her for her med-
of the dling.
Rose

When she returned Floyd was alone. He sat sulky and silent. She busied herself with the household cares for a few minutes. Soon she went over to the lounge and sat down beside him. She put her arm around him and kissed his forehead. "Let's don't be angry on our last night," she begged.

"Why did you do it?" he asked. "I know you

heard what I said to Rose, The
but what is she to you?" The
Heart
of the
Rose

"A great deal," she re-
sponded, "but not so much
as the boy I love so dearly
—the boy I have been a
mother to, and yet I haven't
been a true mother, for I
never have talked to you
of these things because they
were hard. You see I have
failed in my duty."

Instantly he was all ten-
derness. He drew her
down into his boyish long
arms and laid his head
against hers. "You have
not failed in anything, you

The darling!" he cried. "But
Heart of the Rose it wouldn't hurt me. I'm a man. All the fellows do that way."

"How do you know?"

"They tell about it. We don't all talk about it in a crowd, but just when we are together, like John and me."

"Does John treat Rose that way?"

The boy grew warm in a minute. "He'd better not; he went too far to suit me to-night."

"Why did he?" she asked quietly. "You were rather free towards Dorothy."

“Dorothy is different; **The Heart of the Rose** she’s a—she’s—well, she’s a jolly good fellow, but Rose —well, I like Rose, and every fellow better, keep his hands off her. I don’t want a girl all the fellows can love; but I’m different. Those things don’t hurt a fellow; he’s coarser and —well, it’s expected of him.”

“But they do hurt you,” she said. “The little book of memories that Rose gave you this afternoon told a story of its own. I am going to tell you this story.”

The He looked away into the
Heart distance, and she began.
of the

Rose

“Once there was a man who went into a garden. All around him were beautiful roses of all colours. But he chose a little white bud for his. He chose it because it was pure and white, but most of all because it was closed. No other person could see into its heart. While he was waiting for it to unfold he walked around to enjoy the other flowers. He studied their colouring and he

breathed their perfume. For a long time he enjoyed this; then he wanted to get nearer to these roses, to handle them. Other travellers were handling them and they seemed to enjoy themselves more than he did. So he touched one rather timidly; others he was not so careful with. At last he grew tired and wandered back to his own rose-bud and lo! it had opened. It stood the whitest and most fragrant rose in the garden, and its heart was the dewiest and most ten-

The der. But he remembered
Heart the crimson roses and it
of the seemed too white. Then
Rose he could not detect its fra-
grance, for he had killed his
sense of smell by its abuse
with the other roses, some
of which stood as high and
beautiful as before, but
others were left bruised
and broken by his ruthless
desire to please, yes, to
indulge himself. As he
plucked his own rose, he
was aware of no sense of
joy over it, except from
pride, for many travellers
cast him envious glances.

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But he could not see its unusual beauty ; he could not get the fragrance from its heart, because his sense of sight had been dulled by the brilliancy of the other flowers and his sense of smell by their odour.

“ Nor did he think of the little buds in the garden that he had touched and then left. They would perhaps open, but the petals he had touched would always be brown and torn. The passers-by might not see them when the flowers had opened and revealed their

The hearts, but the men who had
Heart of the Rose plucked them would—not
at once, but when they had
become less entranced and
were seeking for defects.
Then perhaps they would
throw the roses away. But
the man who had the per-
fect rose—the one which
was perfect because it had
been well protected—did
not know of the havoc he
had wrought. He was too
much interested in wonder-
ing why he did not enjoy
his rose, why it seemed so
commonplace and really
tiresome. He did not know

that it was he who had become unable to appreciate it, through his own indulgence begun in an idle moment, while he had waited for his flower to blossom."

She paused to look into his face. He was listening. Then she went on :

" You say you are a man ; you have only thought of one side ; you have only wanted the perfect rose. You may get one, but if you do it will be one which has been carefully guarded. You are not intending to

The break or bruise the other
Heart of the
Rose roses; you are just going
to handle them because the
other boys do. You will
enjoy their fragrance, but
you will leave wounded
petals. Then after a time,
if you travel far enough into
the garden, you will grow
indifferent to the havoc you
are doing and will carelessly
crush the flowers. You
may grow so cruel that you
will enjoy it. There are
men who do, and they
started out as free from
intention to harm as you
were to-night. You ca-

ressed Dorothy ; John ca-
ressed her. The next boy
who comes along will find
it easier to be free with her,
and unless there is some
one who cares enough to
guard her she will be torn
from the stem before she
has blossomed. If you had
kissed Rose to-night it
would have been easy for
you to kiss her again. You
haven't yet, have you ? "

He shook his head.

" I am so glad," she con-
tinued. " It will be so much
better for her. If she per-
mits you these familiarities

The *Heart of the Rose* she will permit others the same ones. She may soon become as reckless as Dorothy, and then we dare not think of the future. You can see now what a wonderful flower she promises to make. She is a perfect little bud. Would you not hate to think that you were spoiling the promise of that bud?"

"Forgive me for being so cross," he begged.

"Yes, dear," and she kissed his lips. "But we are going to look at your side now. God made you

so that you have certain desires, certain cravings, that you are to control. Many men will say that they are only to be satisfied, but we know better. The first kiss you give to a girl thrills you—really it is one of the greatest minutes of your life. The next girl you kiss seems less of a pleasure. Then after a while it becomes a mere habit; it loses all sense of enjoyment —the holiness has long since been done away with. Stronger desires than kissing arise and soon you are

**Heart
of the
Rose** The not the man God intended you to be. You will have a low idea of women. Even your wife, if you get the sweetest and purest in the world, will not seem so to you. Marriage will not be a sacred fulfillment ; it will be a commonplace event."

His arms had tightened around her, but he was silent.

"And," she continued, "your future career as a man will be touched. You cannot think clearly or act quickly when any of the senses of your body have

been impaired. Lust kills ambition, ability and power. I do not mean that every boy who starts in this way has the same fatal ending, but a great many do. There is the half-way place where many men stop; yet you will find they are not real men. It will be so much holier and better to stay at the beginning."

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of the
Rose

She sat silent, waiting for him to speak. At last he did. "Of course, Beth, I wouldn't want to go even half-way, now; I wouldn't even want to touch"—and

The a tender smile played around
Heart his lips—"any roses but
of the one. But I cannot see yet
Rose why I can't let her know
that I care for her ; I will
be constant. I want to like
her and I want her to like
me."

She drew a sharp breath.
" You mean you will crush
the petals of your own rose,
and then enjoy the heart
when it is opened. When
you come back you may
not even want to see that
heart ; you are just a boy.
If you do, there will be
times when you will see

those crushed petals and be The
sorry. You may blame Heart
yourself, but you will prob- of the
ably blame Rose. You may
grow so discontented that
you will blame another man.
If you know she allowed
you these caresses, these
little familiarities, you will
think she would allow
others."

He spoke with pride. "I
know Rose."

"We will look at it from
her side. After she realizes
those petals have been
crushed by you she may be
afraid of the future. She

The may be afraid that you have
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of the
Rose

wandered far into the garden and come back to her a worn-out traveller. She may be afraid that you will not appreciate her and that you will not deal rightly with her."

He laughed. "I am not afraid of that."

"Other girls just as constant in their friendship as Rose have felt that way," she said in a low voice.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"My dear boy, I have a few wilted petals and I know

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how they feel. You see, I was like you are. There was no one to guard me and I did just what any girl will do who does not think. But I realized in time to save myself from only a few brown ones, and I want to save every girl I can. We were young and thought we knew our hearts. My, how they changed ! But they couldn't change those bruised petals."

He gave a hurt cry, but he saw a face free from suffering. It held only love for him.

The Heart of the Rose “Floyd, I want to give the world a noble man. That is the dearest wish of every woman. I want to give some woman a pure husband; and oh, my darling boy, I want to give you life in its best and purest forms. I put the first little garment on your little body; I changed you from a little angel to a human being, and I must care for that human being.”

“You angel!” he murmured.

She lifted his chin and looked into his clear eyes.

“I promise,” he said in a low tone.

“It will not be easy, dear. You will have to refuse to listen to other boys, you will have to read only good books and you will have to think pure thoughts. Rose’s little book will help you. You can see the baby that I am trying to keep pure and help me do it; you can see those doll shoes and remember how you suffered on the night you wanted to be happy, because you wanted to do as ‘the fellows’ did. You

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The were so anxious to know
Heart what was in the heart of the
of the rose book. I do not know,
Rose but she did tell me this.
On the second petal—and
you must look at it every
day—is the little picture of
Sir Galahad which your first
teacher gave you. Do you
remember it?"

The boy smiled dreamily
as he quoted—

" My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

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